DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 364 894 CS 214 132

AUTHOR Hindman, Jane E.
TITLE Integrating the Voices: Writing as Healing as the Way to Constructed Knowledge for Basic Writers.
PUB DATE 15 Oct 93
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association (Denver, CO, October 14-16, 1993).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Basic Writing; Class Activities; Higher Education; Metacognition; Teaching Methods; Writing Assignments; *Writing Attitudes; Writing Processes
IDENTIFIERS *Academic Discourse; Basic Writers; Expressive Writing; *Personal Writing

ABSTRACT

Viewing writing as a way to heal wounds and even reconstruct past experiences also helps heal the composition discipline's dichotomy between the academic and the personal, the self and the institution. Academicians are not the only writers undermined by this perceived separation: most incoming university students, in particular basic writers, believe that college writing should be objective and dispassionate in its subject matter and approach. Parallels can be drawn between the composition discipline's notions of discourse and pedagogy and the notions of how epistemological perspectives shape attitudes toward language and authority as presented in the book "Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, Mind." Specific techniques that promote healing through writing, techniques that facilitate the integration of the subjective perspective and the received knowledge perspective essential to constructed knowing are: (1) recognizing windows of opportunity for writing as healing; (2) recognizing when to back off from healing as a goal; (3) achieving connected conferencing with the techniques of "disciplined subjectivity" and "participant observer"; and (4) using metacognitive questionnaires to get closure on the cycle of healing. Such activities suggest positive steps to take to answer the call for a view of academic discourse that incorporates personal expressive writing. (A metacognitive questionnaire is attached.) (RS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 364 894

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
J. Hindman
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

Jane E. Hindman
English Department
University of Arizona
Tucson AZ 85721

Integrating the Voices: Writing as Healing as the Way to Constructed Knowledge for Basic Writers

I hate either-ors. Even though in times of great fear induced insecurity, I fall back on their familiarity, I still hate them. Always have, probably always will. Some people, especially feminist thinkers, hypothesize my loathing as a feminine predisposition. Maybe. I think it's more a result of my autobiography: the eldest of seven daughters in a family with a strict and traditional dad, I've always been one to question authority and most authorities I've ever known rely on dichotomy as a strategy for winning power. Whatever the cause of the trait, you can count on it that I resist being given only two (or fewer) choices. As an undergraduate philosophy major well aware that academics claimed that their authority hinged on logic, I was thrilled when my logic teacher introduced me to the "false dilemma" concept: either/or reasoning is fallacious unless the debater establishes that the two alternatives offered are exhaustive. I revelled in shouting out "false dilemma, false dilemma" when debaters resorted to black and white reasoning tactics.

This penchant is quite annoying to my husband, however. He likes to get things done quickly, is bothered by unresolved conflict or messy disparities. He usually sets his jaw at my now familiar response to his offering of two alternatives, "Are those my only choices? Surely there must be other options." Most of the time, he thinks my way of negotiating takes too long, requires too much analysis; it makes him feel tired. I think his way is limiting and dictatorial; it makes me feel trapped. So we go to therapy to learn how to arbitrate our own false dilemmas, how to heal.

CS 214132

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

This healing of false dichotomies is the kind of healing that I want to talk about today especially as it relates to basic writing pedagogy. I want to theorize briefly about some ways to conceive of writing that will heal what I see as a false dilemma in the ways our discipline has haggled about the nature of academic writing. I also want to present a practical conception of writing that will enable students not only to appropriate the kind of writing and thinking that we as composition teachers view as necessary and beneficial but also to heal the split students often feel (and enact) between the selves of their "real" lives and their academic lives. Finally, I want to offer specific techniques and assignments that can make writing a tool that will facilitate students' personal recovery from past hurts in a writing classroom and in the private, personal realm.

First, the theory. What I see as a false dilemma in the ways our discipline has conceived of writing shows up in the expressivist/academic discourse controversy. A good site of this dialectic is the Spring/Summer 1990 issue of Pre/Text wherein Peter Elbow, Steven North, and David Bartholomae discuss their notions of what constitutes the bounds and limitations of personal, expressive writing and of academic writing. For my purposes today, two essential issues emerge from that debate.

The first point concerns Bartholomae's perceived limitation of personal expressive writing and its potential for disempowering a student; he says, "it is wrong to teach late-adolescents that writing is an expression of individual thoughts and feelings. It makes them suckers and, I think, powerless, at least to the degree that it makes them blind to tradition, power and authority as they are present in language and culture" (128-9). Bartholomae sees the self-authorizing aspect of expressivist writing as its major feature and its

major shortcoming within the context of the work that writing does in a discipline and in the classroom defined and authorized by history and tradition.

> Peter Elbow makes another important point when he acknowledges that
>
> expressive writing inherently tempts writers into myopia, self-absorption and aggrandizement--tempts them to forget difference and the socially constructed nature of the self. . . .[Nonetheless] It is one of the worst cliches of dichotomy-bound thinking to assume that feelings always push us toward solitary unconnected discourse, and that thinking pushes us toward social connection.(10)

In a later article "Reflections on Academic Discourse," Elbow more thoroughly details his idea of how to fuse academic and "personal" writing.

> I want to argue [he says] for one <u>kind</u> of nonacademic discourse that is particularly important to teach. I mean a discourse that tries to render experience rather than explain it. . ., that mirrors back to [students] a sense of their own experience from a little distance. (136, 137)

It is only some version of personal expressive writing that can provide this mirror for oneself. Academic discourse alone does not allow for this emphasis on rendering experience because it's more about abstracting experience. In fact, Elbow says, "the use of academic discourse often masks a lack of genuine understanding" of one's experience ("Reflections" 137), for in academic discourse the writer can often rely on other's renderings of the experience, that is, "on positions defined within the contested terms of the discipline."

> In short [Elbow claims], the very thing that is attractive and appealing about academic discourse is inherently problematic and perplexing. It tries to peel away from messages the evidence of how those messages are situated as the center of personal, political, or cultural interest; its conventions tend toward the sound of reasonable, disinterested, perhaps even objective (shall I say it?) men. (141)

Bartholomae might well acknowledge this limitation of academic discourse, for he certainly recognizes the ways that these perplexing conventions of academic

writing pose problems for the basic writers struggling to learn how to appropriate discursive power in their academic classrooms.

> It is very hard for them to take on the role--the voice, the persona--of an authority whose authority is rooted in scholarship, analysis, or research. They slip, then into a more immediately available and realizable voice of authority, the voice of a teacher giving a lesson or the voice or a parent lecturing. . .They offer advice or homilies rather than "academic" conclusions. ("Reinventing" 136)

Given basic writers' penchant for relying on the received authority of the commonplace, it is little wonder that many teacher complaints about basic writers' work is that it lacks the specificity and sophistication that emerges from self-reflection and genuine understanding, the authority that evolves from an investigation of ideas not immediately available or obvious. To fill this lack, we might do well to heed not only Elbow's revisionist view of writing in the academy but also bell hooks' claim that "writing enables us to be more fully alive only if it is not a terrain wherein we leave the self" (76).

Conceiving of writing as a way to confront and mirror the self, as a path to self-knowledge, is most certainly useful to incoming university students who--of course--have much more on their minds than composition class or discursive traditions. The emotional events of their lives, their experiences, are their immediate concerns; self reflection is not a foreign past time to them. They often have painful memories or pressing dilemmas that they want and need to work through. If I provide them the opportunity to use their composition assignments to do this work, then I give them what bell hooks calls "a precious powerful sense of writing as healing." Given hooks further claim that "writing enables us to be more fully alive only if it is not a terrain wherein we leave the self" (76), I want to facilitate students' use of

writing as a way to render painful (or joyful) experience and reflect on it, for then I will be nurturing a view of writing as a tool that will be useful throughout one's life, not only during college years.

Furthermore, I think that this view of writing as a way to heal our wounds and even reconstruct our past experiences also helps heal our discipline's dichotomy between the academic and the personal, the self and the institution. Academicians are not the only writers undermined by this perceived separation: most incoming university students, in particular basic writers, believe that college writing should be objective and dispassionate in it subject matter and approach, unwavering in its sentiments and suppositions, impersonal and scholarly in its language and tone. Predictably, these students are usually the very ones whose writing lacks authority and passion. In short, these writers are convinced that academic writing has nothing to do with their real lives or emotions. Very, very rarely--if at all--have these writers even imagined writing as a way to resolve what hurts or troubles them. Thus, a conception of writing as a way to confront the self, render one's experience, could not only add more life and commitment to these students' writing but also provide a means by which to heal the split between the "real" self and the "school" self.

In order to add credibility to my claims about what expressive writing can do and to map out methods for teaching that sort of writing in ways that will not make suckers out of students, I would like to turn now to Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule's Women's Ways of Knowing. The book presents five well-defined epistemological perspectives toward the self, authority, and language. The confines of time do not permit me to detail each of these positions here, and I know that many you may already be familiar with their

work. With respect to my purposes today, what is important about these epistemological positions are the parallels to be drawn between our disciplines notions of discourse and pedagogy and Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule's notions of how epistemological perspectives shape attitudes toward language and authority.

For instance, the women authors characterize the position of received knowledge, as a "reliance on authority for a single view of the truth[, a position which] is clearly maladaptive for meeting the requirements of a complex, rapidly changing, pluralistic, egalitarian society and for meeting the requirements of educational institutions which prepare students for such a world."(43) In this description I hear traces of Bartholomae's description of basic writers' penchant to resort to teacher or parental truths and how that perspective does not suffice for those who would successfully appropriate academic discourse.

Likewise, Elbow's acknowledgement that self-authorization does not license one in the academy correlates with Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule's description of the drawbacks for someone operating from what they call the subjectivist's position. The authors claim that "women subjectivists are at a special disadvantage. . .when they go about learning and working in the public domain" because they do not consider ideas external to themselves (such as those gained from books or professors) as sources of knowledge (55). Needless to say, such a perspective on knowledge and authority is a handicap in a discourse community that expects gestures to its tradition of thought and its authorizing conventions.

Marilyn Cooper's synopsis of the fifth epistemological position provides another parallel between disciplinary descriptions of quality discourse and

Women's Ways of Knowing. She claims that

> in the position of constructed knowledge [students] learn to create their own contextual frames for knowing. They are aware of their own ways of thinking and judging; they are tolerant of contradictions and ambiguities; they demand complexity in the models of experience they construct. Their ways of learning and their self-concepts come together; they are "passionate knowers." (Cooper 144)

This description echoes almost word for word the criteria for success on the initial essay assigned in both the basic writing and the "regular" introductory composition courses at the institution where I teach writing.

Clearly then, and though the authors claim that these epistemological positions are not hierarchically or linearly arranged, certain of these perspectives are more conducive to successful academic work. Thus, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule's model of a connected teacher is particularly useful, for it demonstrates how to facilitate the perspective of constructed knowledge and the integration of selves, of voices, required in connected, constructed knowing. The authors explain that

> For women shifting into the position of constructed knowledge, an inner voice and self exist but may have had a minimum of attention, particularly if the women have learned the lesson of 'weeding out the self,' which our academic institutions so often teach. During the transition into a new way of knowing, there is an impetus to allow the self back into the process of knowing, to confront the pieces of the self that may be experienced as fragmented and contradictory. (134, 136)

In the basic writing program I teach for, at least the initial assignment sets the stage for just that kind of confrontation.

What are other ways that we can become connected teachers? Marilyn Cooper, in her article "Women's Ways of Writing," recommends creating a sense of community, passing oral and written forms of language back and forth between students and teachers, presenting the experiences and feelings of previous community members to current ones (154-5). Although these sugges-

tions specifically target a writing program in a shelter for abused women--my hunch is that many of you are probably utilizing these strategies already. I know the basic writing program that I feel privileged to be a part of organizes learning around group work, thrives on the exchange through dialogue on paper and in the classroom. In addition, each semester the program publishes a book that includes a sampling of student essays and candid, informal reactions of basic writing students and instructors from the previous year; not only does the book offer the experience and support of former basic writing students, but also encourages current students to submit their own essays and reactions for publication in the next year's collection. (I have a copy here if you'd like to see one.)

In addition to Cooper's useful suggestions, I want to propose other specific techniques that promote healing through writing, techniques that facilitate the integration of the subjective perspective and the received knowledge perspective essential to constructed knowing.

1) READING AGAINST THE GRAIN: RECOGNIZING WINDOWS OF OPPORTUNITY FOR WRITING AS HEALING.

I once heard David Bartholomae paraphrase Wayne Booth's notion that a good way to find what's truly interesting in an essay is to read only what is written in the parentheses; Bartholomae called this practice "reading against the grain." An example of "reading against the grain" happened during a conference with an English 100 student of mine named Maria. Her response to the first writing assignment (create a dominant impression of a family member or a place) was a short and quite lifeless paper about her younger brother; the essay was replete with the generic he's always there for me, he's very funny, he's so nice, his eyes are so big and shiny sort of descriptions. In

this context Maria wrote that her mother didn't find her brother so cute and added a parenthetical aside: "But what would she know since she was never around to raise him." I mentioned only to Maria that I found that aside to carry the most energy and passion of anything else she'd said in her paper. During the remainder of the conference she talked about how much her mother annoyed her because she didn't treat her brother right and expected Maria to raise him by herself. Maria's next draft was a powerful essay in which she explored not only her resentment of her mother but also her compassion for that woman who had had children out of wedlock, who had struggled when they were young to raise them on her own, and who now struggled with their resentments of her and of her recent husband, their stepfather.

2) RECOGNIZING WHEN TO BACK OFF FROM HEALING AS A GOAL

During a session dedicated to homophobia and part of the "Diversity Forum" series sponsored by the English department, I listened to a young man relating his experience with writing about his homosexuality in a high school English course; trying to maintain his anonymity but also struggling to articulate his growing confusion and social alienation, the student wrote a personal essay as if it were about someone else, the old "I have a friend who's having a problem with. . ." smokescreen. Rather than urge him to continue explore the unresolved aspects <u>of the essay</u>, the teacher with whom the student discussed his assignment kept asking him, "Who is the guy in this essay? Is it your brother? Is it so and so in our class?" Needless to say, the student abandoned the topic, but--years later as he tells this tale at the diversity forum I attended--he regrets having done so since the next opportunity to write about the issue and his confusion did not come until years

later.

Clearly, to create an occasion for private and safe reflection, a teacher must not only protect students' anonymity by not reading their work to others unless permitted but also allow the student to determine the degree to which she or he wants to self-reveal.

3) ACHIEVING CONNECTED CONFERENCING WITH THE TECHNIQUES OF "DISCIPLINED SUBJECTIVITY" and "PARTICIPANT OBSERVER"

The balance between the overly zealous search for connection that is perceived as intrusion and the over caution that maintains separate knowing is, of course, difficult to find and maintain. But these techniques--conceived by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule--help.

One of the ways that I try to achieve this stance is by using what I've heard described as "I language" when I talk with students about the subject matter in their personal essays. In other words, as much as is possible, I talk about my experience and my interpretations and let them talk about theirs.

When, for instance, a basic writing student wrote about the death of her grandfather in her first essay, her essay appeared to me to avoid the issues that I thought she must have been facing, describing very generally instead, her belief that her grandfather was in a better place with god and that the funeral had been so lovely with all the relatives and the flowers. Her paper lacked the detail and grappling with contradictions that would've made it a good essay. I talked with her about my experience when my sister died and I had an important essay due two days later but wasn't sure whether or not to write about what was really on my mind. I told her about my reactions and

feelings--for instance, how startling and almost funny it seemed to see the hair and make up on her body, how I imagined that she would sit up and say "Get this junk off of me, would ya?" but then felt mortified when I started laughing at that though while I was at the viewing of her corpse. I described the way that still now (and in my office that day) the memory of the hunched and crooked way her head sunk into her shoulders haunted me with the picture of what she must've looked like her sailing through the windshield that broke her neck. My description, then, was obviously very personal and very specific; it was, however, spawned by issues the student had hinted at in her essay. Through disciplined subjectivity, I use my own experience in a similar situation to facilitate a student's formulating a hypotheses about her reaction.

In addition, as a participant observer in the writing classroom, I occasionally share with students my own writing in response to assignments similar to the ones they are writing about, and I always share with them my victories and frustrations with my own writing processes as they are occurring. They have heard much about this very paper, for example, since it has been one that has undergone about 20 revisions and that was not completed until late the night before it was due--a strategy I urge them to avoid.

5) USING METACOGNITIVE QUESTIONNAIRES TO GET CLOSURE ON THE CYCLE OF HEALING

[Refer to Attachment #1.] Not only is this technique a useful means for students to come to resolution --at least temporarily--on the issues that might have come up during the process of writing their essays but also it facilitates students' acquiring what Women's Ways of Knowing describes as a requisite to constructed knowing, namely the ability to "'jump outside' the frames and systems authorities provide and create their own contextual frames

for knowing...become aware of their own ways of thinking and knowing." The consistent use of metacognitive questionnaires also allows students to practice what Linda Flower calls the "popping up" to the executive level of problem solving that occurs during the writing process of successful writers.

I initially created and began using these questionnaires as a response to many compositionists (e.g. Scardemelia and Bereiter, Flower and Hayes) notion that the common denominator among experienced writers, one that separates them from novice writers, is the awareness of the need for and ability to make the executive decisions governing writing; these compositionists also contend that a way to develop this awareness is to conclude a project by asking writers to reflect on the strategies they chose to execute their work and on the success of their choices. During the four years that I have been asking all of my writing students to complete a metacognitive questionnaire in class on the days that their major assignments are due, I have witnessed other quite interesting and productive aspects of this practice. In specific, a couple of the questions I added (most notably #2, #3 and #6 on the sample I've given you which corresponds to the first assignment in English 100 class) have evoked answers wherein students articulate their growing awarenesses of themselves as people, as writers, and as integrated selves. They often write that this first college essay differed from others in that they wrote about what they really thought or felt, that this approach was an effective way to write an English paper, that they hadn't realized that writing could be a way to think through a problem. In addition they often write about personal resolutions that they have come to or promises they want to make to themselves or others as a result of what they learned in the course of writing their essays:

"I learned that I want to improve my relationship with my brother."

"I learned that I want to carry on my grandmother's traditions and I haven't been doing that."

"I learned that my mother and I don't get along well but I still love her even though I can't understand why she doesn't like my brother."

"I learned that I need to tell my sister that she shouldn't hit her little girl."

Especially via this latter technique, we can see how this notion of writing promotes not just good writers but connected knowers. These techniques, as well as those suggested by Marilyn Cooper and others I hope to be suggested by you during the question and answer period), are ones that promote healing. They suggest positive steps to take to answer Elbow's call for a view of academic discourse that incorporates personal expressive writing, that encourages connected knowing by "listening, letting other people in, taking in what is outside, relaxing walls and boundaries in one's head, fostering a change of mind" (1990, 18).

Works Cited

Bartholomae, David. "Inventing the University." When a Writer Can't Write: Studies in Writer's Block and Other Composing Process Problems. Ed. Mike Rose. New York: Guilford Press, 1985. 134-165.

_____. "A Reply to Stephen North." Pre/Text 11 (1990): 121-130.

Belenky, Mary Field; Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, Jill Mattuck Tarule. Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind. New York: Basic Books, 1986.

Cooper, Marilyn. "Women's Ways of Writing." in Writing as Social Action. Marilyn Cooper and Michael Holzman, Eds. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1989.

Elbow, Peter. "Forward: About Personal Expressive Academic Writing." Pre/Text 11 (1990): 7-20.

_____. "Reflections on Academic Discourse: How It Relates to Freshmen and Colleagues." College English 53 (1991): 135-155.

hooks, bell. "Writing from the Darkness." Triquarterly 15 (1989): 71-77.

Attachment #1

HINDMAN
English 100

WRITING ABOUT YOUR WRITING PROCESS -- Unit 1 (Use the back if you need to.)

1. What was the most important thing you were supposed to do for this essay assignment?

2. What was the biggest problem for you in writing this essay? How did you solve it? Do you think this was a good solution? Would you use it again?

3. How was writing this essay different from writing others you've done?

4. Rank these activities according to how effective they were in helping you successfully complete this assignment. Comment on what you did or didn't find useful about each activity.

journal writing
peer review
in-class writing exercises
assignment sheet explanation of assignment
in-class discussion of writing
sample student essays
conference

5. What's the most important difference between the first and second versions of your essay?

6. When you were writing this essay, what (if anything) did you learn about yourself? What did you learn about your subject? About writing itself?

7. What other comments about this first assignment or about how the class is going so far do you have? Are you being challenged? Are you overwhelmed? Are you learning anything useful?